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ASIA



CASE STUDY

Building Faster Responses to Disasters

**Incident Command Systems
help countries manage disaster
responses – better and faster**



Incident Command System Training workshop tasks small groups to prepare an operational emergency response plan.

“Sri Lanka has prevailing disaster response mechanisms during and after disaster situations, but not in a very organized way....having ICS will definitely help to improve the response capabilities for disaster management”.

*- Ms. Neranjala Jayasundara, Sri Lanka
Institute of Development Administration*

Tsunamis are among the most challenging disasters to address because decisions to take emergency action must be made and executed quickly—sometimes in a matter of minutes—covering large geographic areas that span international borders. While the governments of some Asian countries have improved disaster response abilities in recent years, many still had great difficulty coping with the tsunami emergency in 2004.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture/Forest Service, with support from USAID, brings extensive disaster warning expertise to the Indian Ocean region to help government authorities, emergency responders, scientists, and local communities to explore, adapt and improve disaster management practices.

Sri Lanka was one of the first countries in the region to introduce a new system-wide disaster management procedure using an Incident Command System (ICS) approach. After initial consultations U.S. experts conducted intensive training with government and NGO representatives, forming Incident Management Teams. To ensure the integration of the ICS into Sri Lanka's existing disaster response system, teams identified and prioritized key issues, and determined roles and responsibilities.

When talking with first responders who attended the training it became clear that everyone is looking to improve their capabilities. One participant, Mr. Vithanaarachchi, Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights said “we were able to help victims after the tsunami but it was not efficient...with better methodology and a systematic approach we could do a better job of helping people”.

Sri Lanka has already moved from a theoretical approach toward actual policy within the Sri Lankan government. The recently released National Disaster Management Policy Draft includes “adopting ICS where possible in response activities at district, divisional and local levels” as one of the 17 Guiding Principles in Disaster Management. Sri Lanka's commitment to training, practice and a policy framework will enable government officials to plan for and react to disasters with greater coordination, speed, and flexibility.